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This history of the international monetary system is short in two senses of the word. First, I concentrate on a short period: the century and a half from 1850 to today. Many of the developments I describe have roots in earlier wars, but to draw out their implications I need only consider the relatively short time span. Second, I have sought to write a short book emphasizing thematic material rather than describing international monetary arrangements in exhaustive detail.

I attempt to speak to a broad audience. One is students in economics seeking historical and institutional flesh to place on their textbooks' theoretical bones. They will find references here to concepts and models familiar from the literature of macroeconomics and international economics. A second audience, students in history, will encounter familiar historical concepts and methodologies. General readers interested in monetary reform and conscious that the history of the international monetary system continues to shape its operation and future prospects will, I hope, find this material accessible as well. To facilitate their understanding, a glossary of technical terms follows the text; entries in the glossary are printed in italics in the text the first time they appear.

This manuscript originated as the Gaston Eyskens Lectures at the Catholic University of Leuven. For their kind invitation I thank my friends in the Economics Department at Leuven, especially Erik Boven, Paul De Grauwe, and Herman Van der Wee. The Research Department of the International Monetary Fund, the International Finance Division of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, and the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations provided helpful settings for revisions. It will be clear that the opinions expressed here are not necessarily those of my institutional hosts.

Progress in economics is said to take place through a cumulative process in which scholars build on the work of their predecessors. In an age when graduate syllabi contain few references to books and articles written as many as ten years ago, this is too infrequently the case. In the present instance I hope that the footnotes will make clear the extent of my debt to previous scholars. This is not to slight my debt to my contemporaries, to whom I owe thanks for